

HERITAGE COUNCIL

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

As a peak heritage body, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Country that we call Victoria, as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, and acknowledge the importance and significance of Aboriginal cultural heritage across the state. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of Aboriginal culture and traditional practices.

## DEDICATION

The Heritage Council would like to acknowledge past member Jeffrey Robinson, who led the Heritage Council's work on heritage and climate change between 2019 and 2023. Jeffrey's passion and drive for sustainability and climate action was instrumental to the Heritage Council's work on climate change, and Jeffrey was a strong advocate for the development of this plan.

## For noting:

- The statutory scope of the *Heritage Act 2017* covers places and objects of cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria, but does not apply to a place or object that is of cultural heritage significance solely on the ground of its association with Aboriginal tradition. In this Action Plan, the terms 'cultural heritage' and 'heritage' are used generically and interchangeably to refer to the 'heritage' to which the *Heritage Act 2017* applies, recognising that heritage places and objects may have multiple attributes and values.
- This Action Plan uses the terms 'place' and 'object' frequently, having regard to the definitions of those terms in the *Heritage Act 2017*. This means that where the term 'place' and/or 'object' is used, the intention is to encompass any and all of the elements used to define those terms as outlined below:
  - The *Heritage Act 2017* defines the term 'Place' to include an archaeological site, an area of land covered with water, a building, a garden, a landscape, a precinct, a shipwreck, a site, a tree, and land associated with any of the aforementioned.
  - The *Heritage Act 2017* defines the term 'Object' to include any fixed or non-fixed object, a collection of objects, a shipwreck artefact, and an archaeological artefact.
- 'Climate change' is defined in the *Climate Change Act 2017 (Vic)*, p. 4, as 'a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods'. This report uses the term 'climate change' as defined above, and to refer more broadly to the impact of global warming and climate change.

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**The Heritage Council of Victoria is proud to launch its inaugural Climate Action Plan. Through this Action Plan the Heritage Council commits to a sustained and collective effort to protect the state's cultural heritage from the impacts of climate change, and to communicate the essential role that conservation of heritage can play in combatting the climate crisis and creating a sustainable future.**

**T**he Heritage Council acknowledges that for thousands of years First Nations people have interacted with and managed Australia's diverse climatic conditions and continue to play a vital role in climate change adaptation. We know that the adverse effects of climate change are being widely experienced across Victoria, and that responses to those effects require ongoing, proactive effort and meaningful collaboration with all Victorian communities.

Over recent years, the Heritage Council has worked hard to prepare a variety of resources for policy makers, heritage agencies, and the managers and owners who are custodians of the State's heritage. These assist in the policy development, management, and vulnerability assessment of heritage places and objects in the face of climate change.

As Victoria's independent statutory authority tasked with the identification and protection of places and objects of cultural heritage significance to the State

of Victoria, the Heritage Council must work towards ensuring Victoria's state-significant places and objects are adapted and resilient to the impacts of climate change. Protection of cultural heritage from the increasingly complex challenges that climate change poses is one of the Heritage Council's top priorities.

The Heritage Council also recognises that protecting cultural heritage has environmental benefits across many sectors. Cultural heritage has a role to play in conserving embodied energy, waste reduction, sustainable use of resources and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The Victorian Government has set world-leading targets to cut the state's greenhouse gas emissions and achieve net zero emissions by 2045. Accordingly, the Heritage Council commits to ensure in this Action Plan that the role cultural heritage can play in the response to climate change is widely communicated and understood, both within and beyond the heritage sector.

This Action Plan includes four distinct areas where the Heritage Council sees that its efforts and resources will make the greatest contribution to the heritage sector's battle against the challenges of climate change.

The Action Plan is a timely document that will remain at the forefront of the Heritage Council's work into the future. Many of the commitments in this Action Plan will be incorporated into its future Strategic and Corporate Plans.

As Chair of the Heritage Council, I am pleased to launch the Climate Action Plan, thus continuing the Heritage Council's work to respond to the threats of climate change, while making a bold and renewed commitment to protect and conserve Victoria's most significant places and objects in the face of that change.

**Prof Philip Goad**

**CHAIR, HERITAGE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA**

**As the Heritage Council of Victoria, our role is to ensure that Victoria's diverse cultural heritage is enjoyed, managed and protected for current and future generations.**

**W**e acknowledge climate change as a global crisis and recognise that its effects are profoundly and severely impacting communities across the planet. Cultural heritage in the form of gardens, landscapes, buildings and objects continue to be impacted by the effects of climate change and face a real and time-sensitive risk of destruction and loss if efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate threats are ignored.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that human-induced global warming, as recorded from circa 1850–1900 to now, has reached 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, and that warming exceeding 1.5°C is likely to occur in the 21st century without rapid and immediate reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> The Paris Agreement – to which Australia is a party – was adopted in 2015 and aims to pursue efforts to limit global surface temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. In 2024, the IPCC warned that during the 12-month period of 2023, global surface temperature 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels had been reached the previous year, with July 2023 the hottest month ever recorded.<sup>2</sup> The IPCC reports that maintaining a global average temperature rise below 1.5°C over the next decade is becoming increasingly difficult, but not impossible with a sustained global effort.<sup>3</sup>

The Victorian Government's Climate Science Report (2019) states that Victoria's climate has increased 1.2°C in the last 100 years.<sup>4</sup> If global emissions continue to increase Victoria will face double the number of very hot days, longer fire seasons, more intense downpours, a decline in cool season rainfall, and sea-level rise, among other adverse impacts.<sup>5</sup>

While some of the work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is beyond our capacity, we must seek to do everything within our power to mitigate the worsening effects of climate change. We see that there are a few areas we can concentrate our efforts.

We recognise that the built environment makes a huge contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, with as much as 25% of Australia's carbon emissions resulting from the construction, maintenance and use of buildings.<sup>6</sup> Cultural heritage is therefore essential to the broader agenda of sustainable development and wise use of resources, through retention and conservation of existing materials and through the embodied energy present in heritage buildings and heritage parks, gardens and cultural landscapes.

Protection of cultural heritage is also important in the global effort to mitigate and adapt to the threats of climate change. Cultural heritage contributes to a

sense of identity and sense of place, which in turn supports the development of resilient and cohesive communities who will be better equipped to respond to the impacts of climate change.

The Heritage Council has a responsibility not only to protect Victoria's cultural heritage from the threats of climate change so that Victorian communities remain cohesive and resilient, but to harness cultural heritage as a tool to contribute towards Victoria's agenda of climate change action.

While the Heritage Council has enacted climate change responses for many years, it is now time to consolidate these into a formal action plan. This will allow the effective partnerships, innovative solutions and wide collaboration required to respond to the challenge of climate change. Our responsibility to recognise and to advise on the steps necessary to conserve Victoria's cultural heritage resources, requires us to commit to bold action so that Victoria's cultural heritage is protected now and into the future.

We commit to use our key relationships, with government and with the community, to drive awareness of our shared responsibility for the protection of cultural heritage against the threats of climate change, so that heritage places and objects continue to play a part in Victoria's thriving, adapted and resilient communities for generations to come.

<sup>1</sup> IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) (2023) *Sixth Assessment Report – Headline Statements*, accessed online [<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/resources/spm-headline-statements>]

<sup>2</sup> Despite the 2023 global surface temperature exceeding 1.5°C the IPCC and the Paris Agreement remain committed to limiting future warming to 1.5°C, and urge continued global efforts to reduce green-house gas emissions to meet the limit target.

<sup>3</sup> IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) (2023) *Sixth Assessment Report – Headline Statements*, accessed online [<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/resources/spm-headline-statements>]

<sup>4</sup> DEECA (Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action) (2021) *Victoria's Climate Change Strategy*, p.9

<sup>5</sup> DEECA (Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action) (2021) *Victoria's Climate Change Strategy*, p.9

<sup>6</sup> Jeroen van der Heijden, 'From leader to majority: a frontrunner paradox in built-environment climate governance experimentation' p.4–5, *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, (2017), data from [https://www.dceew.gov.au/climate-change/emissions-reporting/tracking-reporting-emissions#toc\\_o](https://www.dceew.gov.au/climate-change/emissions-reporting/tracking-reporting-emissions#toc_o)

ACTION  
01

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LEADERSHIP AND  
BOLD ADVICE



ACTION  
02

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CLIMATE-AWARE  
APPROACH IN  
OPERATIONAL  
IMPROVEMENTS



ACTION  
03

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CELEBRATE AND  
PROMOTE EXEMPLARS  
AND INNOVATIVE  
RESPONSES



ACTION  
04

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GUIDANCE AND  
EDUCATION THROUGH  
EFFECTIVE  
PARTNERSHIPS





The Heritage Council acknowledges that action against the threats of climate change must be incorporated into our statutory and operational activity now and into the future. We will do this by embedding climate action into our existing and future Strategic and Corporate Plans.



Great Ocean Road (VHR H2261) Image: Visit Victoria / Jarrod Andrews

The Heritage Council's current Strategic Plan guides our strategic work over five years from 2021 to 2025. This Climate Action Plan is intended to supplement the current Strategic Plan, by linking the Strategic Actions to the Heritage Council's commitments on climate change. The strategies referred to in each Action show how these two plans connect.

While some actions within this Climate Action Plan will commence in the next two years under the Heritage Council's current Strategic Plan, many of the actions represent ongoing opportunities for change and will therefore also be incorporated into the 2026 to 2030 Strategic Plan.

The delivery of these actions will be achieved through commitments in the Heritage Council's annual Corporate Plans, with success reported on in each of the subsequent annual reports. Reporting on the delivery of the actions in annual reports allows the Heritage Council to monitor success of this Action Plan and remain accountable for its delivery.

The Heritage Council's Strategic and Corporate Plans are available on its website: <https://heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/about-heritage-council/annual-reports/>

A painted wall at Fitzroy Pool, home of the "Aqua Profonda" sign (VHR H1687) | Hin Lim Photography © 2021

## ACTION 01

### LEADERSHIP AND BOLD ADVICE



**We will take active steps to ensure that all levels of government, corporate organisations and the community are aware of both the threat that climate change poses to the conservation of the state’s cultural heritage, and the important role that conservation of heritage places can play in combatting the crisis while creating a sustainable future.**

Heritage Council  
Strategic Plan Strategy 1  
– Wider understanding  
of cultural heritage

Commitments	Responsibility
<p><b>A</b> Engage with heritage councils and state agencies across Australia to mobilise a cooperative approach to the protection of cultural heritage from the impacts of climate change, and raise awareness of the role that conservation of heritage places can play in climate mitigation and adaptation.</p>	<p><b>Executive Officer / Heritage Council Chair</b></p>
<p><b>B</b> Communicate the role that cultural heritage can play in a holistic and effective state-wide climate mitigation response, and ensure that the threats of climate change on the state’s cultural heritage assets are understood by all levels of government.</p>	<p><b>Executive Officer / Heritage Council Chair</b></p>
<p><b>C</b> Increase involvement in climate-related government and peak-body events, forums and policy development. Use the opportunity to communicate the role heritage plays in making urban and regional places resilient to the effects of climate change, and of the contribution that cultural heritage can make to the government’s carbon emission reduction goals.</p>	<p><b>Executive Officer</b></p>



## ACTION 02

### CLIMATE-AWARE APPROACH IN OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS



**We understand that taking action against the threats of climate change requires ongoing organisational change and a climate-aware approach in business-as-usual activity. We will engage with our members, the Secretariat and our regulatory stakeholder, Heritage Victoria, to review our processes and procedures to embed climate awareness into our business operations.**

Heritage Council  
Strategic Plan Strategy 5  
– Improved Heritage  
Council operations

Commitments	Responsibility
<p><b>A</b> Explore the integration of climate awareness into all Heritage Council regulatory and strategic policies, protocols and processes and identify a priority list for review and updating.</p>	<p><b>Protocols Committee / Heritage Policy &amp; Practice Committee</b></p>
<p><b>B</b> Hold a workshop with Heritage Victoria to review options for integrating climate awareness, adaptation and mitigation in shared regulatory processes and considerations, and agree on a timeframe for implementing any recommendations.</p>	<p><b>Standing Committee Chairs</b></p>
<p><b>C</b> Incorporate climate change awareness (such as resilience, sustainability or environmental expertise) in future member appointment processes.</p>	<p><b>Executive Officer / Heritage Council Chair</b></p>
<p><b>D</b> Review the Heritage Council’s operational policies in relation to its procurement, meetings, hearings and events, and adjust where appropriate to align with sustainability, waste and climate action best-practice.</p>	<p><b>Executive Officer / Heritage Council Chair</b></p>

## ACTION 03

### CELEBRATE AND PROMOTE EXEMPLARS AND INNOVATIVE RESPONSES



**To contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions and climate change mitigation, Victoria’s cultural heritage places must be equipped with innovative and sustainable design solutions. We will actively engage with and promote industry responses to the challenge of climate change. We will ensure our stakeholders and community are aware of existing and emerging ideas, methods and technology. We will celebrate industry innovation, creativity and best practice.**

Heritage Council  
Strategic Plan Strategy 3  
– Innovative and sustainable heritage practice

Commitments	Responsibility
<p><b>A</b> Develop activities to celebrate and promote best-practice climate adaptation and mitigation methods for cultural heritage places and objects, including through mechanisms such as industry awards, sponsoring events and adding to the communications plan.</p>	<p><b>Communications Committee</b></p>
<p><b>B</b> Develop the Heritage Council website to provide a central repository of resources and guidance on climate change adaptation at cultural heritage places and for heritage objects. The resources will highlight best practice thought leadership, innovative solutions and new technologies.</p>	<p><b>Heritage Policy &amp; Practice Committee</b></p>
<p><b>C</b> Adapt the Heritage Council communications plan to maximise the use of existing communication activities, events and channels to increase public awareness of the climate-related issues affecting cultural heritage and promote exemplars of best-practice heritage climate adaptation and mitigation.</p>	<p><b>Communications Committee</b></p>

## ACTION 04

### GUIDANCE AND EDUCATION THROUGH EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS



**We understand that effective climate action is the result of an informed response. Through the provision of trusted information we will empower government, industry, property owners/custodians and the community to understand the risk and opportunities that climate change poses to Victoria’s cultural heritage. By utilising our existing partnerships, and through collaborations with new partners, we will encourage knowledge sharing and research that contributes to the conservation of our cultural heritage.**

Heritage Council  
Strategic Plan Strategy 4  
– Shared responsibility  
for heritage conservation

Commitments	Responsibility
<p><b>A</b> Address knowledge gaps in the industry by supporting regular collaborative knowledge-sharing forums that connect heritage specialists with other disciplines, such as climate, sustainability, environment, landscape, design and construction experts.</p>	<p><b>Communications Committee</b></p>
<p><b>B</b> Identify, foster and prioritise partnerships with peak bodies and industry experts on topics that are recognised as gaps in the cultural heritage, climate change, sustainability and environment fields – such as embodied energy in heritage buildings, and best-practice adaptation and retrofitting methods.</p>	<p><b>Heritage Policy &amp; Practice Committee</b></p>
<p><b>C</b> Support Heritage Victoria in its development of research and guidance on the climate risk to places and objects in the Victorian Heritage Register, including sustainability, adaptation, and mitigation approaches.</p>	<p><b>Finance &amp; Risk Management Committee / Heritage Policy &amp; Practice Committee</b></p>



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